

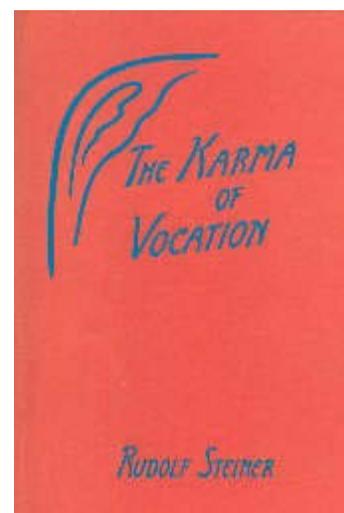
A READER'S JOURNAL

The Karma of Vocation, GA# 117

by
Rudolf Steiner

Ten Lectures in Dornach, Switzerland in November,
1916

Published by Anthroposophic Press in 1984
Book Review by Bobby Matherne ©2003



In this series of lectures, Steiner confronts directly the pervasive dissatisfaction that people have yet today some 80 years later in connection with their

vocations. So many see their vocations as a drudge and wish to be doing something other than what they do to earn their daily bread. Whether one is a lowly shoemaker, as Jacob Boehme was, or patent clerk, as Albert Einstein was, or a simple janitor, as we find in our office buildings today, one's vocation is connected to one's distant future. When one goes to a museum one finds old paintings whose value is accepted by all, not new paintings of beginning painters. It is a human condition that beginnings are minimized and the old and familiar are highly valued. In a similar vein, people generally do not value the beginnings that inhere in their current vocations.

To add concreteness to this metaphor, Steiner reminds us of our cosmic evolution which proceeds from Saturn through the successive stages of Sun, Moon, Earth, Jupiter, Venus, and Vulcan [See the [Table of Evolution](#)]. Those beginnings in us today will flower in the Vulcan stage of our evolution similar to the way the beginnings in us during the Saturn stage are flowering today. Boehme was a great mystical writer who also worked in the vocation of shoemaker.

[page 67] For Boehme to write his mystical-philosophical books on earth, it was necessary for something to have happened on Saturn that was similar to what he has done on earth in making shoes. Likewise, Boehme's shoemaking here on earth has the effect that something may be done on Vulcan that will be similar to his writing mystical philosophy here on earth.

[page 67, 68] There is something extraordinary in all this. Here is an indication of how what is often given little value on earth is so little esteemed because it is the beginning of something that will be prized in the future. In their being, humans beings are, of course, much more intimately bound up with the past since they must first familiarize themselves with what is a beginning. Therefore they often care much less for something that is a beginning than for something that has come over to them from the past.

We live in the 21st Century in a world in which the children of today will likely grow up to take their vocation in a field that hasn't been created yet. I grew up in the 1940's when the job of computer programmer I held as an adult didn't exist yet. While the service jobs of fire-fighting, police work, and teacher will always be with us in one form or another, most of the jobs our children will do as adults haven't been invented yet. When the jobs we do as adults are brand new, we tend to minimize as

insignificant the work of our profession and exult in other, non-vocational, high achievements in our life. Here's how Steiner tells us to hold these two aspects of our work:

[page 69] Superior achievements are an end; the most insignificant work is always a beginning. . . . A seed often appears quite insignificant beside the beautiful flower of the future. Using human work as a case in point, I wanted to show you today how seed and flower are bound up in the evolution of mankind.

For several years I have been reading the Soul Calendar verses by Rudolf Steiner both in the original German and the English translations. Friends have asked me why I read them and it's not easy to explain to them why I do so. His verses remind me of the breathing in and out cycle of the Earth as it wends its way around the Sun going through its seasons. In the following passage he gives us a hint at understanding the breathing cycle of the Earth.

[page 71] I have explained how the earth is awake during the winter and that Christmas time is one of the most brilliant points of this waking state. At that time the aura of the earth is permeated, interwoven, with thoughts. We may say that the earth ponders the outer universe, just as we men, while in the waking state of day, reflect in our thought on what is around us. In summer the earth sleeps, so it is not possible then to find certain thoughts in it. In winter the earth is awake, and most wide awake at Christmas; then the earth's aura is interpenetrated with thoughts, and it is possible to read the will of the cosmos for our earthly events from them.

Most sophisticated persons today consider work in a job as dull and demeaning. They see workers as people caught on a treadmill from which there is no escape. They do not see with the eyes of spiritual science that elemental beings, primitive spiritual beings, are incarnated when people work in their vocations.

[page 118] We have made it clear that what the human being achieves for the world in any vocation is by no means something to be set aside as being prosaic, but that, as we have seen, it is most intimately related with his remote cosmic future. . . . It is precisely the mission of our spiritual scientific endeavors not merely to communicate pleasant sounding theories. Rather, we must let our souls be touched by what is suitable to place us correctly in life so that each person is in his or her own place in accordance with the spirit of our age, with the arché of our time. [Ed. note: Arché is the singular form of Archai or Time Spirits.]

This passage reminds me of EAT-O-TWIST, an acronym I created to remind me that Everything Always Turns Out The Way It's Supposed To, where in this case the supposing goes on during the life between death and a new birth. To understand the impact of a vocation on one's future life, one need only attune to the way one looks and acts in this incarnation to discern the effects of one's vocation during one's previous lifetime.

[page 121] We know that, as a residue of the processes between death and a new birth, all that results from a previous vocational life manifests itself in the physiognomy, gestures, and in the entire hereditary tendency. Thus, it is really possible to see in the human being during this period of time, in the way he walks, in the movements of his hands, in his general bearing, the result of his vocational life during his previous incarnation.

This infusion into one's life of a previous vocation occurs during the development period between the ages of seven and fourteen years of age. After that time, the impulses begin to work on the task of leading us to our new vocation. Thus we are always immersed in the paradigm of our former vocation while we create a new vocation for ourselves. Is it any wonder that so many people don't seem to physically fit our ideas of what vocation they should be in - their bodies, movements, and gestures are holdovers from their

previous lifetime's vocation!

[page 122] You will see what infinitely fruitful thought for future education will result from these reflections if only external world culture can decide to reckon with repeated earthly lives, rather than taking fantastic ideas as truths - fantastic because they only consider a fragment of reality, one that encompasses only the present life between birth and death.

In the play and movie *Oklahoma* there's a song that goes, "The farmer and the cowhand should be friends." The lyrics highlight the difference between the free-ranging cowboy and the fence-building farmer, a difference that was first noted in Adam's sons Cain and Abel in the Old Testament. Today these two archetypes are seen in the wandering mendicants of the East and middle-class business professionals of the West. Steiner called these two the pilgrim and the bourgeois.

[page 124] These two ideals, the bourgeois and the pilgrim, face each other and, unless we realize the significance of this for life, we cannot possibly develop the understanding that is growing within us. In earlier ages men could face life without understanding since they were guided by divine spiritual powers; today, however, as we develop toward the future, we must have understanding.

Steiner points out that we are beginning to perceive these things, but without an understanding of what happens during the time between death and a new birth, we are unable to "comprehend the very thing" that we perceive. (Page 125)

This country was founded on the principle that "all men are created equal" but that ideal seems more like a social goal of the bourgeoisie, one that will replace the great souls of Davy Crockett, Daniel Boone, Buffalo Bill with Harvard Business School MBA's. Steiner looks at what John Stuart Mill wrote about the rise of the bourgeoisie.

[page 126] On the other hand, the bourgeois type works toward levelling and rendering all men equal in the social order. But what, asked Mill, is the result of this process of becoming equal? Not the result of becoming equal in the greatness of the human soul, but of becoming equal in its nothingness. He thus indicates a future for humanity during this fifth post-Atlantean epoch in which men in their social life would become ever more the "pressed caviar" of bourgeois nothingness, and he felt this to be a tragic knowledge.

Steiner tells us that the Russian Merezhkovsky said that "the yardstick has taken the place of the scepter of earlier time, the account book has usurped the place of the Bible and the sales counter replaces the altar." Spencer Heath provided a similar analysis in his fine book, *Citadel, Market, and Altar*.

[page 128] The yardstick, the account book, and the counter do have a place in our fifth post-Atlantean epoch. We know that it must be so and that it is in accord with irrevocable world karma. What is needed is not merely to condemn these things, but to pour into this world of the yardstick, the account book, and the counter the spirit that is alone the equal of them; this is the attitude of spiritual science.

Steiner originally belonged to the Theosophical Society, but soon recognized that bourgeois elements were infiltrating the Society and fostering attitudes that were appropriate to what Mill called "conglomerated mediocrity" or what Steiner called the "pressed caviar of bourgeois nothingness" above. To illustrate his point, Steiner tells us what a representative of the Society told him when he arrived to give lectures in her city, "We shall gradually give up the lectures because they do not have the right objective. We must arrange afternoon teas and invite people to become mutually acquainted." It is easy to see how lucky we are that Steiner left the Theosophical Society with his view of spiritual science intact.

To illustrate dramatically the difference between the "pressed caviar" of the Theosophists and the spiritual

science of Rudolf Steiner, let's look at their respective attitudes about the "8th Sphere". First this long quote from a theosophical encyclopedia:

[See: <http://www.theosociety.org/pasadena/etgloss/ea-el.htm> .]

Eighth Sphere or Planet of Death: Both a globe and a condition of being, where utterly, irredeemably corrupt human souls are attracted, to be dissipated as earth entities. These "lost souls" have through lifetimes lost their link with their inner god, and so can no longer serve as a channel for those spiritual forces. Too gross to remain in kama-loka or avichi, they sink to this slowly dying planet of our solar system, invisible because too dense, which acts as a vent or receptacle for human waste. "The Eighth Sphere is a very necessary organic part of the destiny of our earth and its chain. . . . in the solar system there are certain bodies which act as vents, cleansing channels, receptacles for human waste and slag. . . . [the lost soul] therefore sinks into the Planet of Death or the globe of Mara to which its own heavy material magnetism drags it, where it is dissipated as an entity from above, which means from our globe, and is slowly ground over in nature's laboratory. . . . However, precisely because the lost soul is yet an aggregate of astral-vital-psychical life-atoms connected around a monad as yet scarcely evolved, this monad, when freed from its earth veil of life atoms, thereupon begins in the Planet of Death a career of its own in this highly material globe.

Compare this with Steiner's words on the 8th Sphere:

[page 199] As I have shown you, what is called the eighth sphere was introduced into earthly evolution in ancient times. As one of its aspects, the eighth sphere consists of man's acquiring such a preference for and attachment to his lower nature that Lucifer is not able to remove the higher nature from it. Every time Lucifer endeavored to spiritualize human beings, they were too strongly habituated to the flesh to follow him. If they had not been possessed by this cleaving to the flesh, to the physical nature, they would have followed Lucifer. This is one of the great mysteries of cosmic existence, that a divine element was actually implanted in human nature so that it might have, as it were, a greater heaviness than it would have possessed if this divine and necessary element had not been implanted in it. If it had not been implanted, human souls would have obeyed Lucifer.

In other words, in ancient times, humans were exhorted to revere the things of the Earth so that they would not be led off the earth by Lucifer. With a brilliant insight, Steiner then relates how the revolving of the Moon around the Earth mirrored in the physical world what was happening in the spiritual world to bind humankind to its home on Earth. There is a popular brand of playing cards in South Louisiana called [*Bulldog Squeezers*](#) and the design on the back of the cards shows two bulldogs, each chained to a separate doghouse, pulling against their chains. One dog is named Trip and the other Squeezer. Prominently above them in the sky is a full moon with a clearly drawn face of the Man in the Moon looking down. At the very bottom of the image is the statement in quotes, "There is a tie that binds us to our Home." The image on the backs of those cards has haunted me since the time as a child I first saw my great-uncles playing Pedro with them. Only now with the insights of Steiner's spiritual science am I able to understand the soul impulses that attracted me to that image.

[page 199, 200] What does it mean that the earth has a moon as its satellite? It means nothing more than that it acquired a force through which it can attract and hold the moon nearby. Should the earth not possess this power to hold the moon, then the spiritual correlative of this force would not be able to chain man to his lower nature because this force, from the spiritual point of view, is the same as that with which the earth attracts the moon. It may be said, then, that the moon is placed in the universe as an opponent to Lucifer in order to hinder him.

The tea party attitude with its "pressed caviar of bourgeois nothingness" we find pervasive today as a substitute for real spiritual thinking. It shows up as Luddite-like opposition to machines of any kind, whether they be automobiles, television, or computers. The mothers rush home from their tea parties to announce to their children that there will be no more TV for them. In contrast to this one-sided anti-machine attitude, read what Steiner says.

[page 206] What was symbolically practiced in the ancients cults of Christianity and was once performed only on the altar must take hold of the entire world. Humanity must learn to deal with nature as the gods have done; it should learn not to construct machines in an indifferent way but to fulfill a divine service and bring sacramentalism into everything that is produced.

And the first way we can do that is in the education of our children. He says that we can bring this "sacramentalism to fruition" when we look upon and *make* "the educating and teaching of our children" into a "divine service." The second way is for us to fill our souls with ideas of the spiritual world and to begin to understand thinking as a true sacrament, as Goethe did when he wrote, "Thinking is the true communion of humanity." (Pages 205, 206)

The other day I was writing my review of *The Process of Education* at my workstation when I discovered that there were two ways of looking at a particular arrangement of concepts. Should the highest form of "Unconscious Competence" be equated to the "Articulate Genius" or to the "Inarticulate Genius"? As I engaged in this debate, I found myself split into two persons who engaged in examining the issues from two very different angles. Later when my colleague Brian Kelley read the review he said that he thought that the order should be the opposite of the way I had settled on in the review. I told him immediately with a sureness that surprised me at the time that I had already had this conversation with him at my workstation as I debated the two different ways, and that the "Him in my Head" had won the debate over the "Me in my Head" and that's how it came to be settled the way I wrote it. Later I was amazed to find Steiner writing about Goethe and Schiller in a similar vein in an endnote. Steiner tells us about the relationship between Goethe and Schiller with this excerpt from a Grimm lecture.

[page 223] 34. Hermann Grimm in the 21st "Goethe" lecture: "When two superbly gifted men combine in common endeavors, their strength is not doubled but multiplied fourfold. Each one has the other invisibly next to himself. The formula would not read G + S, but (G + S) + (S + G). The strength of one accrues to the strength of the other."

When we come to understand how "thinking is the true communion of humanity," the tenets of spiritual science will enrich our lives, bringing spiritual nourishment to replace the bourgeois emptiness of the afternoon tea parties.

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